

**Remarks During a Meeting With Department of Defense Leadership**

*April 5, 2016*

Well, good afternoon. This is one of my regular meetings with Secretary of Defense Carter, General Dunford, and our entire military leadership, including our Joint Chiefs of Staff and our combatant commanders from all around the world.

And these meetings are always an opportunity for me to review our defense strategy broadly, the priorities in the budget that can realize that strategy, and most importantly, it gives us an opportunity to talk about our incredible men and women in uniform and the sacrifices they make and the health of the force, and making sure we're doing right by them.

Secretary Carter spoke earlier today about how we have to make sure that the Department of Defense is fully organized and has all the tools that it needs to meet a wide range of emerging threats. I am very pleased that our budget agreement that we signed last year allowed us to get some relief out of sequestration. Those were some harmful cuts on both the defense and the nondefense side. But because of that relief and building on that, the budget that has been proposed makes sure that we're investing in our national security, our global leadership, and our economic security here at home.

We're investing in capabilities that our military needs to deter aggression and defend our security and that of our allies. And this includes increases in our posture in Europe to reassure our NATO allies in light of particularly increased aggressive actions by Russia. It allows us to enhance our maritime cooperation in the Asia-Pacific. It allows us to boost cybersecurity, which is going to be an increasing threat that has to be addressed. It allows us to invest in the future of our force, support our military families, and make sure that our technological edge is maintained relative to forces all around the world.

This will also be an opportunity for us to review the military campaign against ISIL. And although he is not here—because today was his retirement ceremony—I think this is a great opportunity to salute General Lloyd Austin. He served our Nation in uniform for nearly 41 years, including his repeated tours in Iraq. As commander of Central Command, he oversaw the operations from Afghanistan to Iraq and our campaign against ISIL. He did an outstanding job in every single assignment that he received. We are profoundly grateful to General Austin, his wife Charlene, and the entire Austin family.

Our military campaign against ISIL is now being led by General Votel. And Joe has brought incredible skill and dedication to his most recent prior assignment, heading up our special forces. We are working to make sure that we're accelerating the campaign against ISIL. In Syria and Iraq, ISIL continues to lose ground. Coalition forces recently severed the main highway between ISIL's strongholds in Raqqa, Syria, and Mosul in Iraq. And we continue to take on their leadership, their financial networks, their infrastructure. We are going to squeeze them, and we will defeat them.

But as we've seen from Turkey to Belgium, ISIL still has the ability to launch serious terrorist attacks. One of my main messages today is that destroying ISIL continues to be my top priority. And so we can no longer tolerate the kinds of positioning that is enabled by them having headquarters in Raqqa and in Mosul. We've got to keep on putting the pressure on them.

And obviously, that is not just a military operation. That is an intelligence and diplomatic effort as well. And so one of the things we'll talk about here is how we make sure that we coordinate our military activities with the efforts of our other branches of government.

This will continue to be a difficult fight, but I'm absolutely confident that ISIL will lose. We will prevail. And once again, this allows me to say thank you not only to these distinguished members of our Armed Forces, our core leadership that makes things happen day in, day out, but it also is a good opportunity for me, once again, to say thank you for the incredible men and women in uniform and their families who carry such an enormous burden in order to keep us free and in order to keep us safe.

All right? Thank you very much, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:13 p.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Joseph F. Dunford, Jr., USMC; and Gen. Joseph L. Votel III, USA, commander, U.S. Central Command. He also referred to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) terrorist organization.

*Categories:* Addresses and Remarks : Department of Defense leadership, meeting with President.

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*Names:* Austin, Charlene; Austin, Lloyd J., III; Carter, Ashton B.; Dunford, Joseph F., Jr.; Votel, Joseph L., III.

*Subjects:* Afghanistan : U.S. military forces :: Deployment; Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Service and dedication; Defense and national security : Cybersecurity :: Strengthening efforts; Defense, Department of : Funding; Defense, Department of : Joint Chiefs of Staff; Defense, Department of : Leadership and combatant commanders, meeting with President; Defense, Department of : Secretary; Iraq : Security cooperation with U.S.; North Atlantic Treaty Organization; Syria : U.S. and coalition airstrikes; Terrorism : Counterterrorism efforts; Terrorism : Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) terrorist organization; Ukraine : Russia, role.

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